



NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

NEWS RELEASE

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North Dakota Department of Health Notifies Public About Possible Exposure to Hepatitis A Virus

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Health has determined through a case investigation that people who attended the following Catholic churches in North Dakota and had communion on the following dates may have been exposed to hepatitis A virus, which causes an infection of the liver.

September 27, 2013: Holy Spirit Church in Fargo, N.D. (school mass)
September 29 – October 2, 2013: St. James Basilica in Jamestown, N.D. (priest convention)
October 6, 2013: Cathedral of St. Mary in Fargo, N.D.
October 7, 2013: St. Paul's Catholic Newman Center in Fargo, N.D.

Exposed individuals are encouraged to consult their health-care provider if they develop symptoms. Symptoms of hepatitis A include fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, abdominal discomfort, dark urine, pale stools, or jaundice (yellowing of skin or the whites of the eyes). It can take about 15 to 50 days (average is one month) after being exposed to hepatitis A to develop symptoms. Hepatitis A symptoms generally last about two months. If hepatitis A symptoms develop, individuals should exclude themselves from activities for one week after onset of symptoms.

“The risk of people getting hepatitis A in this situation is low, but the Department of Health felt it was important for people to know about the possible exposure,” said Molly Howell, Immunization Program manager for the North Dakota Department of Health. “Only people who attended these specific churches and had communion on these dates were possibly exposed to hepatitis A and should be tested if symptomatic. People who were exposed, but do not have symptoms, are not recommended to be tested for hepatitis A.”

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Visit the health department home page at www.ndhealth.gov.

Hepatitis A virus is found in the stool (feces) of infected people. The virus is most likely to spread when people do not wash their hands thoroughly after using the toilet or changing a diaper or soiled sheets, then touch their own mouths, prepare food for others, or touch others with their contaminated hands. A person infected with hepatitis A is most likely to spread the disease during the two weeks before symptoms begin. Most people stop being contagious one week after their symptoms start.

“Unlike other hepatitis viruses, hepatitis A virus is usually not spread by blood,” said Howell. “This situation is not related to the recent hepatitis C cases in Ward County and involves a completely different virus.”

A vaccine is currently available and routinely recommended for all children ages 12 to 23 months. Hepatitis A vaccine is required for child care entry in North Dakota. The vaccine is also available for anyone who wants to be protected from hepatitis A. Hepatitis A vaccine is often recommended prior to traveling outside of the United States. The vaccine is given as two doses over a six month time period. People who have been appropriately vaccinated are considered immune to hepatitis A.

Hepatitis A can also be prevented by careful hand washing after using the toilet or after diaper changing. Also, infected people should not handle foods during the contagious period.

For more information, contact Molly Howell, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378.

A fact sheet about hepatitis A can be found at <http://www.ndhealth.gov/Disease/Documents/faqs/Hepatitis%20A.pdf>.

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